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Students' Use of Information from Their Readings to Write an Argumentative Essay

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Abstract

This paper examines students' use of information from background texts in their argumentative essays. This cognitively demanding task requires students to select relevant information from background texts in accordance with the new rhetorical purpose and introduce transformations by combining source content to personal background knowledge. Integrating texts content knowledge into one's writing necessitates not only the acknowledgement of the sources in order to avoid plagiarism, but also making use of critical thinking skills to take a position, defend it, analyse and evaluate others' words in one's own. In order to see whether Algerian university students are able to approach the reading-to-write task in an appropriate way, a case study was conducted with six Master students at the University of Algiers II. The participants were provided with two pre-selected source texts as a basis for writing an argumentative essay. Using discourse analysis, their essays were analysed at the microstructural level which pertains to the degree of information integration in students' papers. The results suggest that the students misused the background readings, as they borrowed sentences and connected information from source texts without elaboration and integration. Students' papers seem to be juxtaposition of summaries implying knowledge telling rather than knowledge transforming, which suggests the lack of high order thinking skills. Moreover, some cases of copy/paste sentences were detected.

Keywords: background readings; reading-to-write; argumentative essays; critical thinking skills; discourse analysis.

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1. Introduction

This paper attempts to shed light on the ways Algerian university students integrate information from background texts to write academic compositions. The first section provides a theoretical background regarding the task of reading-to-write. The second section deals with the methodology used in the present study and offers a rationale for data collection procedure, the participants, research tools and data analysis procedure. Section four tackles the findings of the study which will be discussed in section five.

2. Theoretical background

When a literature teacher at the department of English – university of Algiers II – asked her students to write a piece of research in the module of cultural issues, one of her students produced the following passage, which is part of a longer piece of research. The student who is in her third year wrote:

If America's imperialism in Panama never happened the canal would have never been built and none of the U.S ships would have a shorter way to import or export goods. This Canal was also hard to construct. Jimmy Carter, *our president*, signed two treaties to build the canal… [Italics added] Doing research relies on writing from multiple reading sources. When reading the student's passage we immediately realize the apparent copying from another source. What is striking is the fact that the Algerian student did not even try to hide this apparent plagiarism by substituting 'our president' – entailing that the student writer is an American - by, for instance, 'the U.S president'. Such cases of plagiarism are worth to be reflected on by university teachers. Reading-to-write [1], discourse synthesis [2] or composing from multiple sources [3] are all constructs used interchangeably to refer to the complex task requiring students to read source texts and incorporate textual information from these texts in their own product [4]. Writing tasks involving the use of source materials have two major purposes: either simply transferring knowledge from the background texts to the written product like writing summaries and abstracts, or the complex task of using source texts to develop and support one's own thought [5]. The latter purpose of source use implies knowledge-transforming as the writer is engaged in the active and constructive process of relating the contents of sources in new ways, critically assessing different positions and integrating one's opinions into shared knowledge. Such tasks are comparing multiple points of view from written texts and producing a synthesis, writing an extended research paper or literature review.Plakans [6] considers reading-to-write as a unique construct that does not simply imply the combination of the construct of reading together with the construct of writing. Rather, when reading and writing are combined in a single task, namely reading-to-write, new dimensions and characteristics emerge. McGinley [3:230] explains in this regard that reading-to-write entails not only reading and writing but also is expected to promote students' critical thinking skills, as he pinpoints, "composing an essay from multiple sources involves the complex orchestration of a variety of reading, writing, and reasoning activities." Tapping into writer's critical thinking abilities is the dimension that makes the reading-to-write task challenging [7]. What amplifies this challenge is the idea that reading-to-write is not only a question of using sources in an ethical way in order to avoid plagiarism (using others' ideas as if they were one's own), but also it is a matter of distinguishing oneself and finding a position of one's own thinking within other intellectual resources, supporting, therefore, a tradition of uniqueness. Critical thinking is related to the adoption of a logical, deep, authentic and empowering approach to issues and

problems, by attempting to analyse them and to find a solution to them [8]. It is 'critical' as one's intelligence is actively involved in the process of weighing-up the choices of the evidence for explicit claims [9]; 'logical' as it requires presenting evidence to sustain a clear position; 'deep' since it necessitates higher order skills of analysis, synthesis and judgment; 'authentic' as it should reflect the true personal thoughts; 'empowering' a it directs you toward new positions and actions [8]. Spivey [2] proposed a constructivist model of discourse synthesis that comprises three central operations in the process of constructing meaning from texts; these operations are: organizing, selecting and connecting. In undertaking reading-to-write tasks, reading and writing processes are blended to such an extent that it is difficult "if not impossible to distinguish what is being done for purposes of reading from what is being done for purposes of writing." [2: 258]. The first operation in the reading-to-write task is called *organizing process*. At the meaning construction level, the process of organizing lies in using previously acquired knowledge to organize mental information and to determine how the ideas are organized. At the textual transformation level, writers create their own structure to organize selected information from the texts.The second operation is labeled *selecting process*. Regarding the meaning construction dimension, the process of selection entails the determination of the level of importance and relevance of the different contents of the source texts. At the textual transformation level, meaning construction is a selective process in that writers should avoid integrating irrelevant information in their own texts. The third operation is named *connecting process*. At the meaning construction level, the reader makes inferences and connects the pieces of information with his prior knowledge. At the textual transformation level, writers connect the information in accordance with the requirements of the task set for them. Proske and Kapp [10:1338] detected three origins of information used when transforming source texts: the source texts, one's own text and the writer's prior knowledge, as they explain: writers generate relationships (a) within and between several source texts, (b) between source text information and the writer's prior knowledge and (c) within and between the source texts, the current own text product, and the writer's prior knowledge. Writing from sources requires interplay between the ongoing composition process, information from source materials and the writers' background knowledge. Writers evaluate source texts, comparing and weighing up the information on the basis of their previous knowledge, extracting it after selection, and using each new piece of information in accordance with the purpose of the text generated. Hence, reading-to-write task implies 'knowledge-transforming' and the use of critical thinking skills. Gebril and Plakans [11] claimed that EFL students whose native language is Arabic, is a cultural group which is not often represented in the literature dealing with integrated writing; accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to compensate for the paucity of research in this context, and more particularly, the Algerian context. Wette [12] emphasizes that when writers integrate citations from the source texts in their written products, they find difficulties in constructing citations that acknowledge the sources. Moreover, reading-to-write is not a matter of pasting a number of summaries together; instead, it entails not only establishing a particular relationship between the background texts, but it also taps into the students' critical thinking skills to find a position, make judgments and original contributions. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the way university students approach reading-to-write tasks and attempts to answer the following research question:

RQ : How do Master 2 students use information from different background reading texts to write an argumentative essay?

3. Methodology

This study aims at examining how Master 2 students use information from background reading texts to write academic compositions. The case study method used is descriptive as it attempts to obtain information on the particular features of source use occurring in a natural setting, without the intervention of an experiment or manipulation of variables [13].

3.1. Data Collection Procedure

The task was accomplished in April 2016. Qualitative data were gathered from six university students who were asked to produce an argumentative essay based on pre-selected source texts. The six students are supposed to: present both sides of the issue of learning theories in their papers, have a position and support it and seek to convince the reader of the validity of their position. There was an agreement with each participant about specific time and date to perform the task which lasted four hours.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study are six Algerian students enrolled in the second year of Master degree in Applied Linguistics and TEFL in the English department of University of Algiers II. The subjects – whose age ranged from 23 to 25 – had five years of compulsory English at school before reaching university. Across the three years of undergraduate degree course and the two years of Master degree, students were instructed in a wide range of literacy skills such as reading and writing, academic writing, advanced writing, critical readings of literary texts and critical essay writing. Students were also offered courses dealing with the use of sources and research namely, study skills, research methods and research project writing. The selection of the participants in this study was from a group of volunteers on the basis of their average mark obtained in previous academic years. A maximum variation sampling strategy was used in the selection of my subjects.

3.3. Research tool

A reading-to-write task was designed to elicit argumentative essays involving synthesis of two source texts.

3.3.1. The writing prompt

Students were assigned two pre-selected texts presenting opposing viewpoints on the same subject and necessitating a relationship of contrasting/comparing arguments to be established between the texts. The choice of argumentative pattern of writing prompt (appendix 1) was due to the following reasons. First, this genre is common in academic settings [6]. Second, Flower and his colleagues [14:50] consider synthesis with a rhetorical purpose as “the most intellectually sophisticated” task as “it asks the writer to reorganize and integrate information around a controlling concept.” This means that if writers synthesise texts with the purpose of, for instance, elaborating an argument, the outcome will be more than a mere neutral combination of two or more texts into one unified whole. The argumentative essay is composed of an introduction, followed by the body paragraphs, each of which aimed to provide arguments in favor of a given position, arguments against this

position, and the writer's own opinion and position with clear support, and finally a brief wind-up that gives the reader a sense of closure.

3.3.2. Pre-selected source texts

The pre-selected texts are meant to elicit synthesis and comparisons of two views, as well as to allow the detection of 'textual borrowing' by comparing students' essays with the source texts. The topic of both pre-selected sources is theories of learning. The first text is about the theory of 'cognitivism'(appendix 2). The second text is about 'social constructivism' (appendix 3). The topics of both pre-selected sources are common areas of discussion and specialization after reviewing the master course descriptions. The texts were selected from authentic sources downloaded from internet and modified slightly by the researcher for achieving reading ease and similarity in length and readability.

3.4. Data analysis procedure

Students' argumentative essays were analysed using discourse analysis which refers to studying language in use by widening its scope beyond the sentence-level to reach functional objectives [15:4). To shed light on students' use of source information, students' argumentative essays were analysed at the microstructural level following Ackerman's model [16]. Students' essays were analysed in terms of the degree of integration which means the degree to which the contents of the students' essays are elaborated, and concepts and ideas are related in a coherent whole [17]. Students are supposed to evaluate, compare and weigh up information and making links between source texts and their previous knowledge. The origin of information is classified into three main types. The first type is referred to as 'borrowed', when the information is extracted directly from the text without any noticeable modification or elaboration. Ackerman [16] further divides this type into two parts: explicit borrowed and implicit borrowed. He explains that "readers attend to both discrete elements in texts defined syntactically and semantically and to less definite themes, the semantic intent of the author." [16: 148]. The second type of information is called 'mixed' by Ackerman [16].

When writers transform source information, they tend to create relationships within source texts, between source texts, between source texts information and the writer's prior knowledge and within and between the source texts, the current own text and prior knowledge of the writer [10]. The third type of information, 'new information' [16], refers to all the pieces of information that the writer adds from his background knowledge and experience. In order to gain more details concerning the type of each piece of information, the scale of degree of integration developed from least to most integrated piece of information, designed by Campbell [18] was used. The scale ranges from quotations, exact copies, paraphrases, summaries and original explanations. The first four types of information in Campbell's scale are considered as sub-categories of the "borrowed information". There are two types of "paraphrase": the superficial one that I would consider as "explicit borrowed information", and the substantial one that I would consider as "implicit borrowed information". The latter goes beyond word substitutions/deletions or rearrangement of sentence structures, to involve inferential thinking, either deductive (making a conclusion based on statements) or analogical (noticing similarities between two domains) [19. In 20). Writing from sources in the context of this study goes beyond writing

summaries as it requires students to use information for the sake of providing and developing their own arguments. Accordingly, the mixed and new information are classified using Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains, as developed by Maynard [21], which encompasses low order levels: knowledge, comprehension and application, and high order levels: analysis, synthesis and evaluation. A coding scheme was elaborated in which different perspectives were joined together (table 1). Students' essays were parsed into T-units, and then analysed according to the scale of degree of integration (table 1). T-units are defined as "a single independent clause including all modifying clauses" [22: In 18:14]. The shortest unit that can stand alone as a sentence is considered a T-unit.

Table 1: Scale of degree of integration

Origin of information	Type of information
Borrowed Explicit Borrowed Implicit	1. Quotation: exact wording from the source text. 2. Exact Copy: "direct quotations without the punctuating quotation marks" [18:14] 3. Near Copy: "similar to exact copies except that syntax was rearranged, or synonyms were used for one or two content words." [18:14] 4. Superficial paraphrase: involves more syntactic changes of the source text than near copies. However, it brings no major modifications and contains "an appropriation of five consecutive words or more from the source text" [20:135] 5. Substantial paraphrase: "not only by transforming the major components in original excerpt ...into different grammatical forms to express the same idea…but also by adding a phrase or clause to convey ideas that are not explicitly mentioned in the original text" [20]
Mixed	Bloom's Taxonomy: 1. Knowledge: like summary, description, definition. 2. Comprehension: explanation, classification, illustration… 3. Application: generalization, prediction, judging the effects, identification of the results. 4.Analysis: comparison, contrast, subdivision, showing the relevance of a statement, showing inconsistencies, identification of motives/assumptions/main ideas. 5.Synthesis: Creation of an example model or figure, proposition of an alternative, formulation of a rule. 6.Evaluation: critical appraisal of evidence from a scientific perspective.
New	Bloom's Taxonomy (as illustrated in 'Mixed Information')

3.Results

After analyzing students' papers in terms of the degree of information integration, the findings are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Degree of information integration

Type of information		Number of occurrence	Percentages
Borrowed	Quotation	5	3,59%
	Exact copy	8	5,75%
	Near copy	12	8,63%
	Superficial paraphrase	16	11,51%
	Substantial paraphrase	35	25,17%
TOTAL		**76**	**54,68%**
Mixed	Knowledge	7	5,03%
	Comprehension	15	10,79%
	Application	20	14,38%
	Analysis	6	4,31%
	Synthesis	2	1,43%
	Evaluation	0	0
TOTAL		**50**	**35,97%**
New	Knowledge	3	2,15%
	Comprehension	5	3,59%
	Application	2	1,43%
	Analysis	2	1,43%
	Synthesis	1	0,71%
	Evaluation	0	0
TOTAL		**13**	**9,3%5**
Total		139	100%

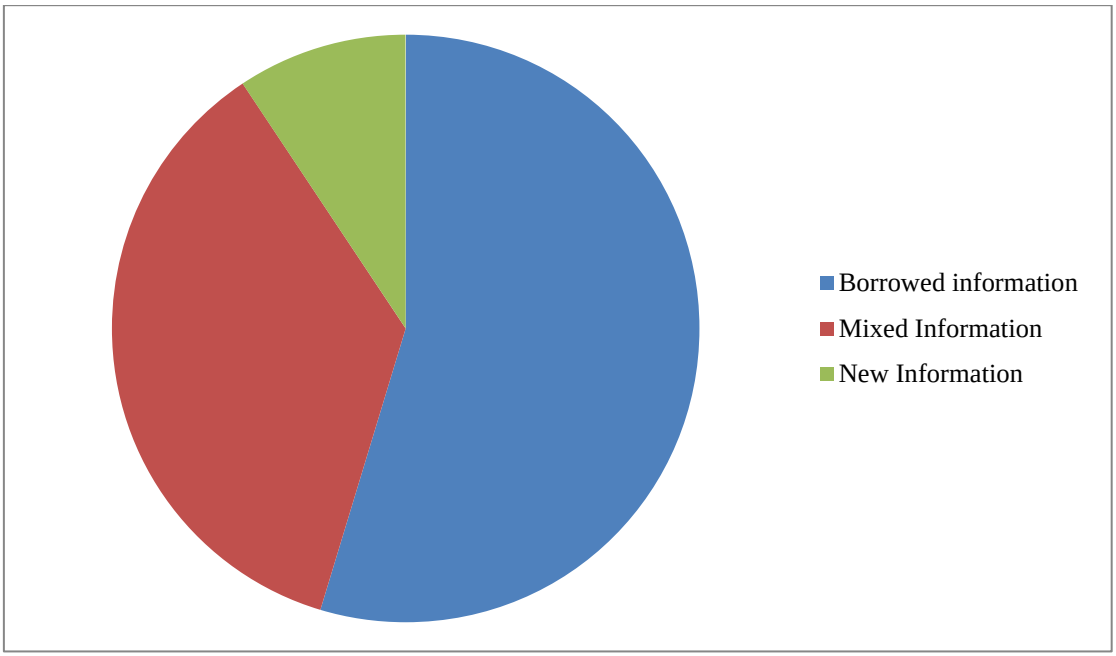

Figure 1: Types of information used by students

The major finding displayed in table 2 and figure 1 suggests that students used mostly 'borrowed' information (54, 68%). Mixed information comes in the second position (35, 97%), and new knowledge is the least used information (9, 35%). Regarding the description of each category in details, 'substantial paraphrase' is the mostly used information (25, 17%). The two types of information that are strongly forbidden in the academia- 'near copy' and 'exact copy' - are used by students by percentages of 8,63% and 5,75% simultaneously.

It is to be noticed that categories constituting low-order thinking skills within mixed and new information are predominantly used by the students. Conversely, categories forming the high-order thinking skills are not widely used. No student reached the level of 'evaluation' in either 'mixed' or 'new' information.

4. Discussion

Students relied mainly on the background texts by selecting information from the sources without relating them to each other or to new information. This is displayed by the proportion of T-units devoted to 'borrowed information' (54, 68%). The use of 'Borrowed information' implies students' recycling of knowledge without genuine attempts to go beyond the source texts by integrating concepts and building links between one's own ideas and those found in the texts. This implies that students relied on 'knowledge telling' –the superficial interaction with source texts - rather than 'knowledge transforming' – an active and constructive process in which the writer relates source texts information in new ways and join them with his schemata.The students behaved in the same way as 'less proficient writers' tended to do when engaging in reading-to-write tasks as Boscolo and his colleagues [17: 422] pointed out, "less proficient writers tend to write syntheses by simply borrowing sentences …without elaboration and integration." And hence, they failed to adopt the position of proficient writers who "seek useful information in the source texts, select it, and then perform various transformations to generate an intertext, in which information from the various sources is conceptually integrated." [17]. This is reinforced by the low percentage of the 'new information' (9, 35%) used by the students revealing clearly that the participants failed at using elaborations and novel ideas to support their positions. Though 'near copies' and 'exact copies' are both considered as unacceptable uses of background readings as they are deemed to be "intellectual theft" and "a serious academic offence" [23], students used them in their essays. The type of plagiarism committed by students is mainly related to the disrespect of the ethics of documentation and citation use. Students may have used unintentional plagiarism due to lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic writing related to citations conventions, how to paraphrase or summarise, ect [12]. Another reason that may account for students' plagiarism is related to 'cognitive immaturity', highlighted by Campbell [18: 29] as students tend to plagiarise believing that relying on others' ideas is a weakness in their own writing: If cognitively immature students produce egocentric writing, that egocentrism may keep them from attributing ideas in their compositions to another author; they may believe that using information from another author somehow diminishes their own writing, and that avoiding reference to that other author makes the information more their own. The issue of plagiarism is difficult to conceptualise without taking into account the students' "cultural, educational, and linguistic distinctiveness" [11:11], and this discussion is beyond the scope of this study. Students relied mainly on lower-level thinking skills though they were assigned the type of writing tasks that appeal students' high level of critical thinking. According to McGinley [3], integrated reading/writing activities spur students to pursue ideas and to judge their own ideas and those of the authors. Writing an

argumentative essay requires more critical thinking skills than writing a summary [24]. The fact that the top of bloom's taxonomy representing the highest degree of thinking skills: 'evaluation' has never been solicited by the students may suggest that the students lack adequate preparation for the complexities of reading critically. Dobson and Feak [25: 188] justify: their lack of evaluative reading experience may lead them to view academic texts as mere storehouses of facts, not subjects for evaluation…and may contribute to their being relative novices at evaluating and synthesizing contradictory claims. Good syntheses should be based on 'evaluation' and judgments as Bergmann [26: 102] highlights: Synthesis uses your responses to make judgments, and the success of a synthesis will depend in large degree on how good your judgment is and how well you understand the sources in the context of their field. Students' papers were 'descriptive' rather than 'analytical'. Descriptive, which is "a symptom of shallow thinking" [8: 27], means relying heavily on facts or statements - an outstanding feature of 'knowledge telling'. 'Analytical', on the other hand, "involves explaining the importance and context of information and showing an understanding of what it implies." [8:27] This is in line with 'knowledge transforming' "where the student writer uses source text material more substantively as a means to develop a larger theme or argument." [27:87]. There is no questioning of the content of the sources on the part of students who do not venture beyond the initial content. Accordingly, the answer to our research question: *"How do Master 2 students use information from different background reading texts to write an argumentative essay?"* is that Master students misused information from source texts as there was evidence of 'recycling' and 'copying' of knowledge without true attempts of evaluation on the part of students who did not show engagement with 'deep' critical thinking that requires higher order skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

This answer spurs us to advance some recommendations for teachers to take into consideration.

5. Recommendations

When students were assigned the task of reading-to-write by using two background texts to write a synthesis in the form of "an argumentative essay", their products were considered more as a juxtaposition of summaries than a genuine integration of information from both reading texts to develop their own arguments to support their own positions. More to the point, some cases of plagiarized writing were detected in the students' essays.

Teachers of the department of English are hence appealed to forge students' personalities as 'independent thinkers' who are able of positioning themselves in the realm of knowledge, to give ample opportunity for students to practice this type of writing, namely reading-to-write. Moreover, the practice should be undertaken by devoting enough time and assigning students a wide range of reading texts of multiple genres like descriptive, argumentative and comparative, to name but few. Teachers may assign tasks gradually from the easiest to the more difficult ones in order to familiarize students with reading-to-write tasks. Nevertheless, we tend to assume that the focus should be put on challenging texts that are sources of debate and analysis as using information from such texts is likely to appeal students' higher-order thinking skills.

Students need to be encouraged to think critically about what they read. This can be achieved through a genuine integration of reading and writing and not setting artificial boundaries between both skills. This can be done through setting such demanding tasks as critically responding to a text and analyzing passages, and not simply

assigning students such tasks as summarization and paraphrasing that, according to Delaney [28], do not foster students' critical thinking skills. As a matter of fact, such tasks as comparing multiple points of view from written texts and producing a critical synthesis, or writing an extended research paper or literature review which require knowledge-transforming are likely to urge students to use higher-order thinking skills. Critical thinking has many benefits as the authors in [29: 8] explain:

Critical thinking teaches students to think their way to conclusions, defend positions on complex issues, consider a wide variety of viewpoints, analyse concepts, theories and explanations, clarify issues and conclusions, solve problems, transfer ideas to new contexts, examine assumptions, assess alleged facts, explore implications and consequences, and increasingly come to terms with the contradictions and inconsistencies in their own thought and experience.

Students should be trained to use information adequately from multiple texts. They should be trained how to be 'critical readers', and they should be informed and trained in the various methods of documenting sources and referencing skills to give credit to the writers whose texts are used by the students. Indeed, raising students' awareness about the necessity of acknowledging sources and practicing in concrete situations how to cite them or paraphrase them is likely to reduce the rate of cases of copy/paste writings which are devoid of 'academic integrity' and trust in one's own words and ideas. Students should be trained in the ethics of documentation and citation not only for the sake of avoiding plagiarism, but also in order to arrive at positioning themselves as active producers of knowledge within the ongoing interaction process with other writers as argued by Bergmann [26: 56]:

The ethics of documentation and citation are not only a set of prohibitions such as … 'do not lift pages or paragraphs from published sources and insert them into papers without adequate references.' Ethical citation is also a means of connecting with and drawing on the knowledge of a field – of an academic community…the processes of citation and documentation may seem …more like a means of establishing a place and a voice in that community. Using sources well shows that you understand the value of research at a university (where original thought is very highly valued) and helps you to place your own writing in the larger context of a field. In this context, teachers are required to inspire students with *confidence in their own thoughts*, *positions*, *voices* and language itself.

6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study was mainly interested in analyzing the products of students' essays written out of the use of information from source texts. Thus, the process of the task of reading-to-write was not taken into account, and more research is advocated to explore how foreign language students go through managing the activity of writing from multiple sources and what are the strategies used by students. Dealing with students with a variety of academic levels – starting from first year to Master studies- would be interesting to grasp an understanding into the developmental stages through which students go when faced with the task of reading-to-write. Furthermore, it is worth conducting attitudinal studies to shed light on students' attitudes regarding the notion of plagiarism so that to diagnose any inconvenient views and perceptions that may tolerate cases of plagiarism. A

potential line of research may be related to intervention studies aiming at introducing a treatment of reading-to-write instruction during a given period of time for the sake of gaining insights about its effect on students' use of information from multiple sources. For time constraint, the present study sought to explore students' use of information through one task set by the researcher – argumentative essay. The use of another topic rather than the one used in the study – theories of learning- may reveal other findings as learning performance may vary across different topics. Accordingly, we urge other researchers to undertake research by investigating other genres of writing like, comparison-contrast and descriptive writing and other topics of various points of interest. The choice of the research methodology (case study) which allowed us to work with a small number of students preclude me from making confident claims about its generalisability and from drawing general conclusions. As a result, large-scale studies are advocated in order to widen our understanding of the nature of the process and the product of reading-to-write task in the foreign language context.

7. Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating students' use of information from background reading texts in their argumentative essays. In the review of relevant literature, the cognitive processes of the task reading-to-write were examined. When the six participants were assigned a reading-to-write task in which they were required to synthesize information from two texts using argumentation, they did it in an inappropriate way as they relied mainly on 'borrowed information' without true elaboration and integration. As the students' essays were predominantly summaries and paraphrases, they did not manifest engagement with higher order thinking skills. This result may be accounted for in terms of lack of practice in the task of reading-to-write. Ample time should be devoted to offer opportunities for students to practice this type of writing. Teachers are also required to enhance students' critical thinking skills through critical reading and analytical writing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Reading-to-Write Prompt

As part of your participation in this study, I would like you to read the question below, and then read carefully the two texts to get more information bearing in mind that they will be used as background readings for writing an essay.

The question: Synthesise information from the two texts to elaborate a well-structured **argumentative** essay, expressing your position clearly.

Instructions to students

- You may go back to the passages to use information and make references while writing.
- The use of a dictionary is allowed.
- The number of lines of your essay is not limited.
- Write the essay for a general university-level audience.

Appendix 2:Text 1

Adapted from: Zuzana Horaničová. "The influence of cognitive psychology in second language instruction." *www.phil.muni.cz/angl/thepes/thepes_01_17.pdf*

Cognitivism—the belief that much of human behavior can be understood if we understand first how people think—presently represents the mainstream of thinking in both psychology and education (Bower and Hilgard 1981).

The most prominent characteristics of the cognitive approach could be described as the focus on the processes underlying complex learning.

The development of cognitivism has influenced learning theory and research in several significant ways (Shuell 1986; Schwartz and Reisberg 1991).

Current cognitive approaches to learning stress that learning is an active, constructive, cumulative, and self-directed process that is dependent on the mental activities of the learner (Shuell 1986; Sternberg 1996). The cognitive orientation focuses on the mental activities of the learner that lead to successful learning. This explicitly acknowledges the role of metacognitive processes and the use of various learning strategies. Memory and learning both require the learner to actively construct new knowledge and strategies (Rumelhart and Norman 1981). Transfer of information into permanent storage is facilitated by rehearsal of the information (particularly if the information is elaborated meaningfully), by organization (e.g., categorization) of the information, by the use of metamemory strategies (e.g., writing lists or taking notes). The learners tend to remember better when knowledge is acquired through distributed practice across various study sessions, rather than through massed practise, although the distribution of time during any given study session does not seem to affect transfer into long-term storage (Anderson 1983; Sternberg 1996).

Since learning is goal-orientated, the learner must somehow organise his or her resources and activities in order to achieve the goal of learning. Learners selectively encode information, sifting out relevant from irrelevant information in the input, in order to select information for further processing (Deci and Ryan 1985). Motivation and interest are central in how learners select and persist in processing information: as a strong motivating force both individual and text-based interests have a profound facilitative effect on cognitive functioning and learning. Selectively encoded information is then selectively combined and compared, i.e. it is rendered meaningful by perceiving its relations to old information previously stored. This knowledge-acquisition processes operate on a variety of cues present in the material being learned, although utilization is affected by moderating variables such as a number of occurrences, variability of contexts and importance of the to-be-learned information.

Learning is cumulative in nature: nothing has meaning or is learned in isolation. Cognitive conceptions of learning place considerable importance on the role played by prior knowledge in the acquisition of new knowledge (Rumelhart 1980)…

…In addition to the cognitive factors, affective personality factors contribute to successful learning as well. Learning attitude and motivation are important predictors of achievement (Deci and Ryan 1985). Intrinsic motivation is an important element in successful learning, and it is seen as a general drive towards self-direction and self-determination. Self-direction describes an attitude to learning where the learner assumes increasing responsibility for his or her learning (Little 1991; Hammond and Collins 1991).

Changes in the way we think about learning and what we know about the way learning occurs have important implications for the way we think about teaching.

Understanding the nature of learning process elicits the active role of learners in theprocess where they are responsible participants and not simply passive responders. In fact what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the instructor does. What this means is that the instructor's role is different from the one frequently envisioned in traditional conceptions of teaching with instructors most often monopolising either parts of or the whole learning process in which, in fact, students ought to be gaining experience. What needs to change is the focus as well as the realisation that good teachers are not merely people

who can articulate a large number of relevant facts and ideas; effective teachers must know how to get students actively engaged in learning activities that are appropriate for the desired outcomes. This task involves the creation of the appropriate selection of content, an awareness of the cognitive processes that must be used by the learner in order to learn content, and an understanding of how prior knowledge and existing knowledge structures determine what the student learns from the material presented…

…Rethinking language learning in view of the cognitive process involved in learning as well as the affective factors contributing to the process can provide effective guidance for the redesign of instructional contexts so that they would encourage the kind of intentional learning where learners perceive their active role as intelligent agents in the learning process. The goal is to enable the learner to become increasingly self-directed and responsible for his or her own learning. This process means a gradual shift of the initiative to the learner, encouraging him or her to bring personal contributions and experiences.

Another key issue is that of mindful, meaningful engagement, with students given opportunities to engage with instructional materials and become active contributors to their language learning rather than passive recipients of knowledge. A design model for a language learning environment should foster the sense of personal engagement and discovery essential to successful language learning. The teacher provides the rich context of authentic language, and the students discover language rather than study it: they are actively engaged in negotiating meaning and developing strategies for discovery. Students then are cognitively involved in seeking answers, making generalisations, and testing their hypotheses…

…The learning and teaching activities that are selected to realise the objectives and the syllabus organization are guided by the understanding that what learners remember is the product of their interpretation, not the raw data themselves. Therefore, learning and instruction activities are designed to involve concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization; active experimentation.

A final theoretical consideration is the development of autonomy-supporting structures that facilitate independence of learning, offering the learner opportunities for choice and decision making, and, in general, promoting the learner's self-determining status.

Direct learner involvement in activity development and organization enhances the self determining status of students. Moreover, such activities draw students into the teaching-learning process in an active and reflective manner; they involve learners in aspects of diagnosis and evaluation which are generally considered to be the teacher's prerogative…

Appendix 3: Text 2

Adapted from: M. Gail Jones and Laura Brader-Araje.**The Impact of Constructivism on Education: Language, Discourse, and Meaning.** ACJ 5: 3, 2002.

…Social Constructivism

Vygotsky's (1987) work has formed the foundation of social constructivism in educational settings. In particular, Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of others, or the social context, in learning has pushed educators to re-examine the extent to which learning is an individual process. As explained earlier, prior to the recent interest in social construction of knowledge, the attention was placed almost exclusively on the individual through behaviorist and Piagetian educational applications. Vygotsky's theories have turned this focus upside down by emphasizing the role of the greater community and the role of significant others in learning.

Vygotsky argues that language is first interpersonal, between the child and the external world, and then becomes intrapersonal:

The greatest change in children's capacity to use language as a problem-solving tooltakes place somewhat later in their development, when socialized speech (which has previously been used to address an adult) is turned inward. Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves; language thus takes on an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use. (Vygtosky, 1978, p. 27)

Furthermore, Vygotsky argues that the path between objects and thought is mediated by other people through the use of signs or the symbols of language (Veer & Valsiner, 1993).

Human history is, then, on the one hand the history of man’s growing domination over nature through the invention of tools and the perfection of technology, and on the other hand, it is the history of man’s gradual control of the self through the invention of the cultural technique of signs. (Veer & Valsiner, 1993, p. 220)

In addition, Vygotsky extended the emphasis on culture and society in his argument that all higher mental functions are social in origin and are embedded in the context of the sociocultural setting.

From the very first days of the child's development, his activities acquire a meaning of their own in a system of social behavior and, being directed towards a definite purpose, are frequently refracted through the prism of the child's environment. The path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person. This complex human structure is the product of a developmental process deeply rooted in the links between individual and social history. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30)

The higher mental functions that Vygotsky refers to are primarily interpsychological (group, dyad) processes and originate between and among individuals. These functions move to an intrapsychological (individual) plane by a series of mechanizations determined by the individual's mental processes. That is, learning may be viewed as being first developed in small group settings that are precursors to the intrapsychological, that is, individual processes (Wertsch, 1979).

Learning, according to Vygtosky, is best understood in light of others within an individual's world. This continual interplay, between the individual and others, is described by Vygotsky as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). He defined the zone of proximal development as the intellectual potential of an individual when provided with assistance from a knowledgeable adult or a more advanced child. During this assistance process, an individual is "other regulated" by a more capable peer or an adult. "Other

regulation" refers to cues and scaffolding provided by the more capable peer or adult. The individual, by means of this assistance, is able to move through a series of steps that eventually lead to "self-regulation" and intellectual growth. Vygotsky stressed the importance of the zone of proximal development because it allows for the measurement of the intellectual potential of an individual rather than on what the individual has achieved.

For social constructivists, the process of knowing has at its roots social interaction (von Glasersfeld, 1992). That is, an individual's knowledge of the world is bound to personal experiences and is mediated through interaction (language) with others (von Glasersfeld, 1989). Thus, learning from a social constructivist perspective is an active process involving others:

Knowledge is never acquired passively, because novelty cannot be handled except through assimilation to a cognitive structure the experiencing subject already has. Indeed, the subject does not perceive an experience as novel until it generates a perturbation relative to some expected result. Only at that point the experience may lead to an accommodation and thus to a novel conceptual structure that reestablishes a relative equilibrium. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize the most frequent source of perturbations for the developing cognitive subject is the interaction with others. (von Glasersfeld, 1989, p. 136.)

…Social constructivist applications are commonly found in schools through the wide spread use of cooperative and collaborative teaching strategies such as: Teams-Games-Tournament, Student Teams Achievement Division, Jigsaw, Numbered Heads Together, and Peer-Peer Tutoring (e.g. Slavin, 1980; 1990). In each of these, the emphasis is on having students working together while sharing ideas and challenging each other's perspectives.

The emphasis on "significant others" has led some educators to question the usefulness of homogeneous ability grouping (Carter & Jones, 1994). Grouping by ability has come under fire as a traditional strategy that fails to build on the strengths of diverse student abilities and perspectives. As a result, teachers are increasingly using older student tutors, adult tutors, and more advanced students in instruction.

One of the most obvious places that the impact of social constructivist theories can be seen is in the design and organization of classrooms. Gone are the individual study carrells that appeared with behaviorism. Teachers today tend to recognize the power of peer-peer interactions and the greater classroom community in learning. Many classrooms in the United States have designated spaces for small group work, as well as arrangements for whole class discussions. Elementary classrooms often include small group reading areas, mathematics centers, and science stations. Middle and high schools have moved away from unmovable desks to seating arrangements that are flexible and allow for small group work…

…The constructivist focus on the social context and larger community of learners has resulted in a major shift away from individually-based instruction to instruction that incorporates and embeds teaching within the larger community of peers, younger students, as well as those who are older…